

#BeRCSI Bulletin 10

Dear Colleagues,

This is the last Friday in February signaling the end of another month of 2021. We are all feeling the effects of living through this pandemic, some of us have lost loved ones to Covid-19, some of us are struggling with living in isolation or juggling caring & work responsibilities and we have all had to stay away from those we hold dearest to keep them safe. This has not been an easy road that we are travelling, but the end is on the horizon as the vaccination programme is rolled out and brighter days approach. We must each call upon our reserves of strength to persevere and get through these final few months. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt “Courage is not having the strength to go on; it is going on when you don’t have the strength”, so we ask you to have courage, to continue to pull together, to connect with each other and to remember to **Be Kind**, to yourself and to others, we are all doing our best at the moment. We would like to remind staff to take their annual leave if you can to rest and recharge, remember you can’t pour from an empty cup.

Pulse Survey

We want to share with you some of the high level results from our most recent **Pulse survey**. A more detailed breakdown of the results and our corresponding actions is contained in the attached document. 531 staff members participated in the survey administered by our colleagues in the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO).

We are encouraged to see that there is **96%** of staff agree about the effectiveness of RCSI’s communications regarding safety-related efforts and protocols. That **83%** of staff who work on campus feel safe and supported, and **88%** of staff feel supported while working from home. It is heartening to see the level of engagement between managers and teams remains high with **84%** of staff confirming they have regular contact with their managers, **81%** feel connected to their teams and **87%** feel they can contact their managers when needed.

Notably and not unexpectedly, the average wellbeing rating on the 10 point scale was slightly lower compared to November at 6.68 (November average was 7.12). This drop may be attributed to the current restrictions and general lockdown fatigue and also the time of

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year. It is encouraging to see that **84%** of staff confirmed they are aware of the RCSI health and wellbeing resources available to them and where to find them. For those who do not here is the link to the [Staff Covid-19 Supports & Resources portal pages](#).

We have pulled some of the **main themes** arising from the freetext comments below, again more detail is contained in the attached document:

Focus on Wellbeing: Some colleagues in the survey commented they would like **additional Wellbeing supports & content**, we would like to know more specifically what additional topics would help you during this time. Please take a minute to provide this information through this [anonymous form](#). We are grateful to all our colleagues who shared their practices for boosting their resilience. We received over 300 comments with **connecting with colleagues** and **staying active** (especially walking) cited as the most frequently mentioned ways to build resilience (over 50 comments each). The full list of comments is available in the attached document and we will also post these on WorkVivo in the coming days, we could all do with some inspiration on ways to boost our resilience.

Future of work: A theme that was understandably mentioned by many colleagues was for clarity around what the future of work will look like at RCSI. We would like to assure staff that we are actively working on this and different potential models of work. We look forward to communicating this with more certainty in the coming months as society returns to a more stable state.

Communications: We will continue to communicate to all staff in an open and transparent manner through the CEO & HR emails and our Townhall meetings. We will endeavor to keep All Staff emails shorter (after this issue!!).

Covid-19 Update

We ask that any RCSI member of staff who is pregnant to please make Health and Safety (safety@rcsi.ie) and Human Resources (HRqueries@rcsi.ie) know at the earliest opportunity. While this has always been the case, recent HSE guidelines have stated that pregnant workers should be given *special consideration with regards to avoiding exposure to Covid-19*. Also a subset of pregnant women may be considered as being in the “*very high risk*” category depending on their circumstances and this needs to be assessed at an individual level, which RCSI Health and Safety can do. Thus we are particularly requesting that any pregnant staff member who is working on a clinical site or with a patient contact role to make contact with us so we can provide the right level of support as soon as possible.

More information available by clicking on the links to the Pregnancy [Risk Assessment Procedure](#) and the [Risk Assessment Form](#)

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Now for some levity! We love catching up with different teams across RCSI and this week we hear from a team that have not only survived but thrived over the past year. This is from Lisa Maye-Gregory and the **School of Postgraduate Studies Team Spotlight!**

The SPGS admin team of Lisa Maye-Gregory, Kathleen Molloy, Jean Carter and Dean Lennon expertly manage the academic journeys of over 300 research scholars under the leadership of Professor Niamh Moran, Head of School and supported by Emer Reeves, Darran O'Connor, Deirdre Fitzgerald-Hughes and Triona Ní Chonghaile.

COVID has shown us just how talented and innovative our team are. Jean and Dean had only started in RCSI when we moved to remote working and Kathleen ensured that they, and all members of the SPGS, effectively transitioned to our new reality.

Our most pressing concern at shut-down was managing and reassuring scholars due to have their *viva voce* examinations. To ensure graduation plans weren't impacted, we immediately revisited our examination policies and put in place appropriate infrastructure to ensure a robust online process that candidates felt comfortable with. Since then, Kathleen has arranged and managed 60 online *vivas*, working with health science experts from around the globe, often in multiple time zones, giving her a new understanding of 'international time management'! With everyone working from home, juggling home schooling and child-minding we've had the pleasure, on the odd occasion, to have a quick visit mid-*viva* from a child or pet, with only one casualty reported to date: 'Daddy the goldfish is upside down'! (Poor Goldie L)

Our next priority was to provide ongoing support and reassurance to scholars, some new to RCSI, some with caring responsibilities. Many of our scholars and supervisors are front-line healthcare workers at the coal face of the pandemic. To support them in keeping their research projects on-track, Niamh set up weekly online drop-in sessions to provide a regular 'place' for issues to be raised. Jean organized a weekly newsletter, ensuring up-to-date communication with scholars on RCSI's plans and events. Jean also took on the onerous task of transitioning face-to-face modules to online platforms and ran a successful induction week with new scholars; earning herself the title, 'SPGS Moodle Queen'. Our weekly drop-in sessions have now been expanded to include virtual research seminars and a careers workshop.

With some creative re-organising and new initiatives we have continued to meet our recruitment targets. Our MD StAR 2020 interviews moved on-line in March. This cohort, beginning their clinical research careers at the most uncertain stage of the pandemic faced significant challenges. Under the direction of Emer, we recruited and managed project

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development and on-boarding of our largest intake since the programme began in 2016. We now have scholars from three private hospitals and the programme continues to grow.

Meanwhile, Darran was exploring new international collaborations when he landed in Bahrain just as it locked down. Once he made it home safely, himself and Dean transformed themselves into Estate Agents to find appropriate quarantine accommodation for our new StAR international PhDs, Fulbright scholars and five scholars from Soochow, China. Excitingly, under the leadership of Triona, we also recruited our first scholar to our new Intercolated MSc programme. This is a research programme for undergraduate medical students who take a year out of their medicine programme to complete a substantial research project. Having got the scholars here safely, Niamh became a tour guide, providing socially distanced walking tours of Dublin for the city's newest residents; while Dean facilitated their onboarding and welcome to RCSI and was an important support and point of contact for them.

Our success in meeting our recruitment targets and ensuring that scholars get off to the best start possible, depends heavily on the work of the Academic Review Committee. Deirdre has led these activities, supported by Dean, overseeing the review of 87 applications since March. Importantly, the committee now also ensure that researchers fully consider the potential impacts of COVID on their projects.

In November 2020, Lisa was appointed SPGS Manager. Lisa arrived to find a happy camp of consummate professionals, highly engaged, fully operational and well in control of business as usual. Under Niamh's leadership, we are very proud to have worked with the Events team to virtually graduate 56 researchers in the last year, with another 29 scholars preparing to virtually graduate in May. The SPGS team, our scholars, their supervisory teams, reviewers and examiners have shown, and continue to show, great strength of resolve and perseverance in these extraordinary times.

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(Pic above is of the socially distanced walking tour by Niamh)

We will leave you this week with Hope, Hope for a brighter tomorrow.

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hope

If you only carry one thing throughout your entire life, let it be hope. Let it be hope that better things are always ahead. Let it be hope that you can get through even the toughest of times. Let it be hope that you are stronger than any challenge that comes your way. Let it be hope that you are exactly where you are meant to be right now, and that you are on the path to where you are meant to be... Because during these times, hope will be the very thing that carries you through.

- Nikki Banas | *Walk the Earth*

Stay safe and continue to look after yourself and each other,

Barry & the HR Team

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